

Retired Chancellor Sebe Dale Jr. died April 5, 2016

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Retired Chancellor Sebe Dale Jr. died Tuesday, April 5, at his home in Columbia. He was 94.

A funeral service for Judge Dale is scheduled for 11 a.m. Friday, April 8, at First Baptist Church in Columbia. Visitation will begin at 9:30 a.m. – his usual time for starting court. Interment will be at Woodlawn Cemetery. Hathorn Funeral Home in Columbia is handling arrangements.

Judge Dale retired Dec. 31, 2010, after 42 years on the bench, 32 of that as chancellor of the 10th Chancery District. He was a Youth Court referee for 10 years before he was elected to the Chancery bench. The 10th Chancery District includes Forrest, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River and Perry counties.

Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam remembered Chancellor Dale as a mentor. She followed him as 10th District Chancellor when he retired. “Judge Dale lived a life of service to his state and country in the military, as a lawyer, and then as a Chancery Judge. As a lawyer, he taught me respect for the court and love of the law. He retired from the bench just short of 90 years old. When I followed him as Chancellor, I constantly reflected on things he taught me. We have lost a humble servant and dear friend today, and Judge Dale is no doubt hearing the words ‘Well done.’ ”

Court of Appeals Judge Eugene Fair of Hattiesburg served alongside Judge Dale as a Chancellor for the 10th Chancery and practiced law before him. “He is my hero. He was one of those people who teaches you how the job is done. He was a judge’s judge. If you want to be a good judge, you try to be like Sebe Dale.”

Judge Fair said Judge Dale was always available to the lawyers. “He was one of those people who went to his office every Saturday morning and probably on Sunday afternoons. If you needed to talk to him, you could find him.” Judge Dale had that same work ethic as a lawyer in private practice. Judge Fair recalled handling a child visitation dispute in which Judge Dale represented the other parent. “We called Mike Sullivan, who was chancellor, on Christmas Day because the daddy and mama were fighting over visitation. We showed up in court the 26th day of December, whatever year that was, and tried that case. He was always available.”

Tenth Chancery Court Administrator Lisa Martin Stringer worked for Judge Dale for 13 years, from the time she was a high school senior until he retired. Judge Dale gave prayerful consideration to the decisions he was called upon to make in family law disputes. “He worked very hard and the decisions didn’t come easy,” Stringer said. “He wanted to do what was right for those children....I always remember him making sure that he had the best interests of the children at heart. He prayed for guidance on how to best serve those children.” Stringer said that Judge Dale called termination of parental rights “the closest thing to a death sentence in Chancery Court. His happiest day in court was a day that he got to do an adoption. He got to create a family that day.”

The building where Judge Dale held court in Columbia, formerly known as the Chancery Court Annex, was renamed “The Sebe Dale, Jr. Chancery Court Building” in his honor in November 2010, shortly before he retired.



At the ceremony to rename the courthouse, Judge Dale said that he followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. His grandfather, John B. Dale, was president of the Marion County Board of Supervisors when the main courthouse was built in 1905. "He set a track for me and my father set a track for me. I've done my best to be true to it. Thank you so much," he said at the ceremony.

Judge Dale was a member of the Mississippi Judicial College Board of Governors for 22 years, 18 of that as chairman. He was a member of the State Penitentiary board for eight years. He served as chairman of the Conference of Chancery Judges and of the Judicial Advisory Study Committee, and as president of the Marion County Bar Association.

Judge Dale was a graduate of Columbia public schools, Mississippi College and the University of Mississippi School of Law. He was admitted to the Mississippi Bar in 1948, and engaged in the private practice of law for 31 years. He was a recipient of numerous awards, including the Chief Justice Award, the Mississippi Bar Lifetime Achievement Award and the Mississippi State University Prelaw Society's Distinguished Jurist Award.

He was a veteran of World War II, having served four years of active duty in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was a reservist for 27 years, including service in the Judge Advocate General Corps. He retired at the rank of Colonel in 1981.

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